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THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROMANTIC BYRON: SCOTCH REVIEWERS AND FRENCH CRITICS

KONSTRUKCJA ROMANTYCZNEGO BYRONA. SZKOCCY RECENZENCI I FRANCUSCY KRYTYCY

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In most parts of nineteenth-century Continental Europe Byron functioned as a Romantic icon. His name became one of the battle cries of the new generation of writers who debuted in the late 1810s and 1820s. This identification of Byron with Romanticism was very much the product of French men of letters and reviewers whose articles circulated widely all over the Continent, where French served as a *lingua franca*. The examination of the most influential French and Swiss accounts of Byron, in turn, reveals that their construction of the Romantic Byron heavily relied on the reviews published in the leading British periodicals, particularly "The Edinburgh Review". Byron's British literary and social celebrity became rewritten into the iconic image of the Romantic poet to such an extent that the very name "Byron" became synonymous with "Romantic poet".

This phenomenon may be examined in terms of *rewriting*, a reassuringly self-explanatory concept introduced by André Lefevere. Lefevere draws attention to the significance of "middle men" – critics, editors, translators, and anthologizers – in the reception of literature by general audiences. Most non-academic readers read literature not as it was written, but in the way it was "rewritten" by various "rewriters", who have shaped the images of writers, literary works, genres, literary periods, and even whole literatures[1]. Lefevere points to the fact that these images have reached more people than the actual literary works, so what interests him is the process by which

[1] A. Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, London 1992, p. 4.

these images are constructed. According to Lefevere, "[r]ewriters adopt, manipulate the originals [...] to make them fit in with the dominant, or one of the dominant ideological and poetological currents of their time"[2]. One of the problems with Lefevere's argument is the fact that it accounts neither for the significance of the text itself, nor the involvement of the reader, nor for the fact that the originals may also be used to promote new ideas. Nonetheless, it usefully theorizes the process in which we as literary scholars are implicated, and by which we unavoidably have been influenced.

Traditionally, the British and Continental receptions of Byron have been studied separately, with recent studies focusing on the subject of Byron's celebrity in Regency Britain on the one hand, and Richard Cardwell's two-volume collection of essays on *The Reception of Byron in Europe* documenting the momentous afterlives of Byron's myth and works in various national cultures on the other. It has been widely noted that in many countries such as Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Russia, Byron's poetry was read mainly in French translations, and early articles on Byron in Polish periodicals were adaptations from the French[3], but not much attention has been paid to how strongly the French authors originally relied on British reviews.

Jerome Christensen has pointed out that the original British celebrity of Byron in his years of fame was "the collaborative invention of a gifted poet, a canny publisher, eager reviewers, and rapt readers"[4]. Yet as Andrew Rutherford noted, Byron was cast in the role of the Romantic poet by French writers and critics and the image spread throughout Continental Europe owing to the wide circulation of French publications[5]. The ground had been prepared for them by the British reviews, particularly Francis Jeffrey's articles in "The Edinburgh Review", which presented Byron in the role of the most prominent representative of a new trend in British literature, that of literature of passion and introspection, and pointed to his dangerous Satanic sublimity and his magnetic power over his readers.

William St Clair has persuasively argued that literary criticism played a much less significant part in popularizing literary works in Britain in the early nineteenth century than was believed by contemporaries or than is generally accepted nowadays, as books had been sold, read and judged before the reviews were published[6]. However, while St Clair provides persuasive evidence on the negligible role of periodicals in forming the original British reception of Byron's works, it has been well documented that Continental readers were first introduced to Byron and his works through magazine articles[7]. Moreover, the British reviews very often served as sources for Continental journalists, who rewrote them, adapting them to their own aesthetic and political agendas.

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2 *Ibidem*, p. 8.

3 R. Cardwell, *Introduction*. In: *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, ed. R. Cardwell, 2 vols, London 2004, vol. 1, p. 3; p. 4. For particular instances in Polish early articles on Byron, see S. Wasylewski, *U świtu romantyzmu. Pierwsze sądy o Byronie w Polsce (1816–1822)*, „Pamiętnik Literacki" 1913 no 12, pp. 156–68.

4 J. Christensen, *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society*, Baltimore 1993, p. XX.

5 *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, ed. A. Rutherford, London 1970, pp. 20–21.

6 W.St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, Cambridge 2007, p. 189.

7 R. Cardwell, *Introduction.* In: *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, vol. 1, pp. 2–3.

For Francophone men of letters, who were very much concerned with the emergence of the new "Romantic" literature, Byron, as presented by British periodicals, appeared to embody the most salient features of the new literary school. They thus applied the "Romantic" label to him and his works, and it has stuck on the Continent ever since. In Italy the *Romantici* wanted to recruit him to their cause, and while Byron himself did not want to be connected with any literary school, in 1819 the Austrian authorities were informed by a local police agent that he was involved with the *Società Romantica* as he had "written, and continue[d] to write, poetry of this new school"[8]. Significantly, the term was not applied to Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were little known on the Continent at the time. In Britain, there was a clear sense of them constituting a new literary school; yet though the Schlegels' and Staël's taxonomy was known (and Coleridge actually presented it in his lectures), no such label was attached to them[9]. According to David Perkins, the term was first used in reference to Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry as late as 1863 by Hippolite Taine in his influential *Histoire de la littérature anglaise,* and it gradually caught on in England[10]. Meanwhile Byron had been seen as one of the most influential figures of various national Romantic movements. On the other hand, when the word "Romantic" was adopted by Anglo-American criticism in the course of the twentieth century, Byron started to be perceived as the least Romantic among the English Romantics, since the bulk of his poetry did not seem easily to match René Wellek's criteria of nature, imagination and symbol[11], nor the more recent suggestions of idealism as the Romantics' shared characteristic.

Of course, what is at stake is the very notion of Romanticism: why was there a need for the term on the Continent, while in Britain early nineteenth-century critics refrained from using it in reference to the changes they observed in contemporary literature? The very meaning of the word *romantic* is obviously equivocal. In early nineteenth-century Britain it was primarily used in the sense of "tending to write in the manner of a romance" (*OED*), and thus, as Raymond Immerwahr suggests, possibly referred to the expansive effect that romances exerted upon the imagination of their readers: transporting them out of their humdrum everyday experience into exotic

[8] *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, vol. 4 ed., R.E. Prothero, *Appendix VI. Extract from the Archives of the Police*, London 1900, p. 462. Obviously, *Childe Harold* Canto IV was referred to as the most seditious (p. 463). Qtd. in R. Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950: The Romantic Age*, New Haven 1955, p. 110.

[9] Wellek, *A History…*, p. 110.

[10] *The Construction of 'The Romantic Movement' as a Literary Classification*, Nineteenth-Century Literature 1990, vol. 45, no. 2, p. 136. According to Taine, "the English Romantic school" ("l'école romantique anglaise") emerged around 1793–94 and resembled the French Romantics. Characteristically, he refers to Jeffrey's review of Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer*, where Jeffrey attacks Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey and Lamb as members of a "*sect* of poets", who are "*dissenters* from the established systems in poetry and criticism" ("Edinburgh Review", Oct. 1802, vol. 1, pp. 63–83 (p. 63). Taine rewrites this passage as "secte de dissidents en poésie". *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 3 vols, Paris 1863, vol. 3, p. 471. Google book.

[11] *The Concept of "Romanticism" in Literary History: II.The Unity of European Romanticism*, "Comparative Literature", Spring 1949, vol. 1.2, pp. 147–172 (p. 147). On the history of the use of the term, see also Aidan Day, *Romanticism*, London 1996, pp. 78–125.

settings and distant ages; introducing them to wonderful adventure, extraordinary virtue and intense passion; affording the boundless freedom of wild nature and primitive society as a release from the regular monotony of modern urban civilization[12].

In the history of literary criticism, the word, together with its derivative noun "Romanticism", forces us to enter the marshy area of literary classification, whose pitfalls have nowadays made many scholars abandon the idea of periodization altogether. Paradoxically, although the term was in wide use in Germany, Italy, France and Russia in reference to old or /and new trends in literature in the early nineteenth century, and not used in Britain in reference to the new literary developments, according to Eichner, the critical usage of the term on the Continent was a borrowing from the English by the German critics. Thomas Warton had casually used the distinction between the classical and the romantic in his *Observations on the Faerie Queene (*1754), applying the term to the medieval romances, Ariosto's and Tasso's *romanzi,* and similar works of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Gerstenberg and Herder adapted this meaning of the word into their more formal classification, and thus set the stage for Friedrich Schlegel's postulates for the renewal of modern poetry by return to romantic tradition. These ideas were disseminated throughout Europe by August Wilhelm von Schlegel's Berlin and Vienna lectures (1801–1804; 1808), the latter published as *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Poetry*, and widely translated throughout Europe[13].

A.W. Schlegel contrasts "ancient" or "classical" art and literature with "modern" and "romantic". He illustrates his classification with the examples of Dante and Ariosto, who in spite of their attempts to imitate Virgil and Homer, did not create "classical" works but produced "modern" masterpieces far superior to their models. Schlegel underscores the importance of the original genius, arguing that "mere imitation is always fruitless; what we borrow from others must be again as it were born in us, to produce a poetical effect". For Schlegel, the European modern mind was formed by Christianity, which had infused it with a longing for transcendence: "When the soul, resting as it were under the willows of exile, breathes out its longing for a distant home, the prevailing character of its songs must be melancholy. Hence the poetry of the ancients was the poetry of enjoyment, and ours is that of desire; the former has its foundation in the scene that is present, while the latter hovers between recollection and hope"[14].

Schlegel's taxonomy was popularized throughout Europe by Germaine de Staël's *De L'Allemagne* (1813). As John Clairborne Isbell notices, Staël adopted Schlegel's idea of Romanticism and used it "as a perfect label for her own global agenda, and sold this private agenda to Europe's half-formed anti-Classical reactions"[15]. Following

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[12] R. Immerwahr, "*Romantic" and Its Cognates in England, Germany, and France before 1790*, In: "*Romantic" and Its Cognates: The European History of a Word*, ed. by H. Eichner, Manchester 1972, pp. 17–97 (p. 18).

[13] H. Eichner, *Introduction*. In: "*Romantic" and Its Cognates: The European History of a Word*, pp. 6–8.

[14] A.W. Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature,* 2 vols, transl. by J. Black, London, 1815, vol. 1, p. 6, p. 7, pp. 15–16. Google book.

[15] J.C. Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's "De L'Allemagne", 1810–1813*, Cambridge 1994, p. 4.

Schlegel, Staël saw Romantic literature as inspired by the spirit of the chivalry and Christianity of the Middle Ages, and regarded Shakespeare's works amongst its chief masterpieces. While Classical literature, according to Staël, focused on the external events, modern literature focuses on character and the turbulent mental struggles of the self:

> In ancient times men attended to events alone, but among the moderns character is of greater importance; and that uneasy reflection, which, like the vulture of Prometheus, often internally devours us, would have been folly, amidst circumstances and relations so clear and decided, as they existed in the civil and social state of the ancients[16].

As opposed to Classical literary tradition cultivated in France, the Romantic was rooted in particular, national cultures, and hence had a wide, popular appeal and was capable of further improvement. Thus German and English literatures, which according to Staël had cultivated the Romantic mode, should serve as models for the development of French literature. Although Staël's and Schlegel's works were published in England (in 1813 and 1815 respectively), and their views were well known[17], the literary classification was not used at the time, probably because the distinction between the Romantic and the Classical did not seem relevant to the current British literary debates, or perhaps because, according to Staël's classification combined with her earlier taxonomy of literature into the literature of the North and of the South, British literature was seen as Romantic.

Byron, who knew Staël's classification and observed the debates between the Romantics and the Classicists in Italy (in which the former signed him up on their side), did not recognize the distinction as applicable to British literature, as is apparent from his unpublished dedication to *Marino Faliero* addressed to Goethe (1820):

> I perceive that in Germany as well as in Italy there is a great struggle about what they call '*Classical and Romantic*', terms which were not subjects of Classification in England – at least when I left it four or five years ago. […] Some of the English Scribblers (it is true) abused Pope and Swift – but the reason was that <they> they themselves did not know how to write <in> either prose or verse, […] but nobody thought them worth making a Sect of. – Perhaps there may be something of the sort sprung up lately – but I have not heard much about it, – and it would be such bad taste that I should be very sorry to believe it[18].

Yet on 5 September 1817 he wrote to John Murray that he and his British contemporary writers "[were] upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system – or systems

[16] G. de Staël, *Germany*, transl. from the French, 3 vols., London 1813, vol. 1, p. 306. Google book.

[17] See Wellek*, A History…*, p. 110.

[18] Lord Byron, *The Collected Poetical Works*, ed. J.J. McGann, 7 vols., Oxford 1980–1993, vol. 4, pp. 546–547.

– not worth a damn in itself"[19]. In the Bowles/Pope controversy in 1821 he classed himself "amongst the builders of this Babel", refraining however from using the word "Romantic"[20], although he referred to the taxonomy introduced by the Schlegels and Staël, and pointed to its reductiveness, noticing the parallels between their classification and the positions of the two contending sides in the debate in Britain[21].

Was Romanticism the system that Byron had contributed towards building, or was he rather enlisted in its cause by his Continental contemporaries, who were fascinated by the ideas of the new literary school propagated by the Schlegels and Staël? To his Continental European readers *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and the Turkish Tales appeared to exhibit the most salient features of the trend, particularly when they read the reviews in British periodicals, particularly "The Edinburgh Review".

In 1816 Henri Beyle, better known as Stendhal, who actually met Byron in Milan, wrote to his friend Louis Crozet:

> This system, in the way that is practiced by Lord Ba-ï-ronne (Lord Byron, the young peer, a thirty six [sic!] year old Lovelace) and in the way that is taught by *The Edinburgh Review*, is bound to attract the human race. Schlegel remains a ridiculous pedant. [….] Byron, Byron is the name we must ring out loud. The Ed. Rev. places him just after Shakespeare in the painting of energetic passions[22].

Stendhal is referring here to Francis Jeffrey's 1814 review of *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair*, where Jeffrey presented his "cyclical theory of taste", to borrow Rutherford's phrase, to account for the recent developments in British literature[23]. Jeffrey argued that in primitive societies violent passions constitute the main poetic subject. With the progress of civilization people learn to control their feelings and the era of good taste and civility follows; however, true sensations gradually become repressed by artificial rules, "poetry becomes first pompous and stately – then affectedly refined and ingenious – and finally gay, witty, discursive and familiar"[24]. As a reaction to this decline in poetic taste, there naturally follows a return to the fascination with

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19 *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. L.A. Marchand, 13 vols., London 1973–1994, vol. 5, p. 265. Hereafter *BLJ.*

20 *Letter to John Murray Esq*., *The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. A. Nicholson, p. 148. Qtd. in Wellek, *A History…*, p. 123.

21 *Ibidem*, p. 142.

22 "Ce système tel qu'il est pratiqué par Lord Ba-ï-ronne (Lord Byron, jeune pair, Lovelace de trente-six [sic !] ans) et tel qu'il est enseigné par *l'Ed[inburgh] Review* est sûr d'entraîner le genre humain. Schlegel reste un pédant ridicule [....] Byron, Byron est le nom qu'il faut faire sonner ferme. *L'Edinburgh R[eview*] le place immédiatement après Shakespeare pour la peinture des passions „énergiques". To Louis Crozet, le 28 septembre 1816, Stendhal, *Correspondance I: 1800–1821*, ed. H. Martineau and V. Del Litto, Paris 1968, p. 819, p. 820. The texts Stendhal referred to were *The Corsair*, *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*, which he called "histoires d'amour tragiques", p. 820. The translation is mine apart from the penultimate sentence qtd. after P. Cochran, *From Pichot to Stendhal to Musset: Byron's Progress Though Early Nineteenth-Century French Literature*, In: *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, vol. 1, p. 56.

23 *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, p. 53.

24 [F. Jeffrey], Review of *The Corsair* and *The Bride of Abydos*, "The Edinburgh Review" 1814, vol. 23, pp. 198–229 (p. 200).

great passions and primitivism, especially among those who being at a higher level of civilizational development no longer feel threatened by them. According to Jeffrey, an essential difference in the depiction of violent sensations between primitive and early-nineteenth-century literatures consists in the fact that whereas the former focused on the consequences of passion, in the latter, "[t]he minds of the great agents must be unmasked for us – and all the anatomy of their throbbing bosoms laid open to our gaze" so that the reader can identify with their feelings[25]. Byron is the greatest representative of this mode of poetry, though the tendency is also observable in the writings of Scott and Southey.

Stendhal used passages from Jeffrey's article to characterize the new literary developments he postulated in *L'Histoire de la peinture en Italie* (1817) and his 1818 essay *Qu'est-ce que le Romanticisme*? On being first introduced to "The Edinburgh Review" by his English friends, he reports to Louis Crozet that this initiates "a great, though at the same time very discouraging epoch for my spiritual history" as he has found out that most of the ideas he prided himself on having presented in *L'Histoire de la peinture en Italie* (1817) derive from "general and more elevated ideas presented in this cursed book"[26]. In his final chapters of *L'Histoire* he openly translates, or rather rewrites, Jeffrey's theory of the development of taste to posit that the literature of the nineteenth century should be a literature of passion, and he repeats the same phrases in his 1818 pamphlet:

> La poésie anglaise est devenu de nos jours, et depuis la Révolution française, plus *enthousiaste*, plus *grave*, plus *passionnée*. Il a fallu d'autres sujets que pour le siècle spirituel et frivole qui avait précédé. On est revenu à ces héros dont les grands caractères animèrent les poëmes énergiques des premiers et rudes inventeurs; ou bien il a fallu aller chercher des hommes semblables parmi les sauvages et les barbares. [Est-ce parmi les jeunes élégants de Paris que lord Byron aurait trouvé le caractère sombre de son *Giaour* et le caractère bien plus touchant de son *Corsaire*?][27].

In the essay he labels the literary excerpts published in "The Edinburgh Review" "Romantic" and assigns to the journal the role of the main promoter of Romantic literature. His *romanticisme* derives from the Italian word *romanticismo*, drawing upon

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25 *Ibidem*, p. 203.

26 "une grande époque pour l'histoire de mon esprit; mais en meme temps une époque bien décourageante"; "idées generales et plus élevées, exposées dans ce maudit livre", Stendhal, *Correspondence I*, p. 819, my own translation.

27 Stendhal, *Qu'est-ce que le Romanticisme?*. In: *Racine et Shakespeare. Études sur le romantisme*. *Œuvres complètes de Stendhal*, Paris 1854, pp. 229–257 (p. 250). Google book. The last sentence is a new addition in the essay. See also Stendhal, *Histoire de la peinture en Italie*, Paris 1817, vol. 2, pp. 428–429. Google book. Cf. Jeffrey: "Poetry [...] reflects and partakes in this great transformation [apparent in the 'political enthusiasm' of the time]. It becomes more enthusiastic, authoritative and impassioned; and feeling the necessity of dealing in more powerful emotions than suited the tranquil and frivolous age which preceded, naturally goes back to those themes and characters which animated the energetic lays of its first rude inventors". [F. Jeffrey], Review of *The Corsair* and *The Bride of Abydos*, "The Edinburgh Review" 1814, vol. 23, p. 200.

the literary debate going on in Lombardy, where he was living at the time. For Stendhal the *querelle* in France should be understood in terms of the struggle between Racine and Shakespeare, Boileau and Byron, and French neoclassicists should look to "The Edinburgh Review" for their true opponents[28]. Interestingly, Stendhal's attitude towards Byron drastically changes five years later, when in *Racine et Shakespeare* he no longer views him as the "head of the Romantics" and refers to him as the author of "some sublime, but always the same epic poems, and of many mortally boring tragedies"[29].

Echoes of Jeffrey's reviews are to be found in other French-language periodicals and through them throughout the rest of the Continent. Perhaps the most striking example of an enthusiastic rewriting of his comments, strongly reminiscent of Stendhal's reaction, appears in Philarète Chasles's *Essai historique sur la poésie anglaise et sur les poètes anglais vivants* published in "Revue encyclopédique"[30]. Like Stendhal, Chasles drew strongly on Jeffrey's reviews, using his cyclical theory of taste to explain the recent developments in English literature, enthusiastically presenting Byron as the greatest poet of passion.

While Stendhal and Chasles used the authority of "The Edinburgh Review" to advocate their radical vision of Romanticism as the literature of passion, already in 1817–19 the Swiss journalist and politician Charles Pictet de Rochemont rewrote Jeffrey's review of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III and *Prisoner of Chillon* in his series of articles on Byron in the Geneva-based "Bibliothèque universelle". According to Peter Cochran, it was through the pages of "Bibliothèque universelle" that "the myth of Byron as a Satanic, seductive figure of misanthropic depravity sprang fully armed from the collective unconscious of right-wing Europe"[31].

Cochran rightly points out the significance of Pictet de Rochemont's publications in constructing the image of Byron for Continental readers, but what is also worth stressing is the fact that the first of these articles consisted mainly of rewriting of Jeffrey's review of *Childe Harold*, Canto III and *Prisoner of Chillon* in "The Edinburgh Review", which is apparent in the argumentation, use of imagery and the selection of the quoted passages. Hence the image of Byron which was spread throughout Europe by the Swiss periodical was the creation of Jeffrey, readjusted to the ideological and poetological needs of Pictet de Rochemont.

In his review Jeffrey complains that Byron "delights too exclusively in the delineation of a certain morbid exaltation of character and feeling, a sort of demoniacal sublimity, not without some traits of the ruined Archangel"[32]. This image of Byron as

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28 Stendhal, *Qu'est-ce que le Romanticisme*?, p. 233.

29 "quelques héroïdes sublimes, mais toujours les mêmes, et de beaucoup de tragédies mortellement ennuyeuses". Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare*, p. 35, my own translation.

30 P. Chasles, *Essai historique sur la poésie anglaise et sur les poètes anglais vivants*, "Revue encyclopédique" 1821, vol. 9, pp. 228–240; 446–58. Google Book.

31 P. Cochran, *From Pichot to Stendhal to Musset: Byron's Progress through Early Nineteenth-Century French Literature.* In: *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, vol. 1, pp. 32–70 (p. 40).

32 [F. Jeffrey], Review of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto the Third*, "The Edinburgh Review" Dec. 1816, vol. 27, pp. 277–310 (p. 279). ProQuest. The comparison of Byron's persona to Milton's Satan had already appeared in Jeffrey's review of *Childe Harold*, Cantos I and II, "The Edinburgh Review" Feb. 1812, vol. 19, pp. 466–77 (p. 467). ProQuest.

Satan obviously originated in allusions to Milton's Satan present in his works, and it was quickly adopted in the imagery of literary criticism, finding probably its most striking literary expression in Lamartine's *L'Homme* in his *Meditations* (1820). Jeffrey on the whole praises Byron's emotional intensity and stresses his hold on his readers, though he objects to what he perceives as his apparent identification with his morally dubious protagonists and his misanthropy. Byron himself appreciated Jeffrey's review though he realized that it contributed to spreading his misanthropic reputation: "I suppose now I shall never be able to shake off my sables in public imagination"[33].

Byron's prediction came true instantaneously. In his rewriting of Jeffrey's article, Pictet de Rochemont stresses the moral dangers that Byron's works pose to their readers, but he also emphasizes the power of his poetry and laments what he perceives as the abuse of his poetic imagination in directing the mind of the reader to misanthropy and melancholy. He does not use the term "Romantic" in reference to Byron's poetry, though the Satanic image of Byron he constructed in his reviews anticipated the Byron of the French Romantics[34].

The wide circulation of the „Bibliothèque universelle" among European intellectual elites means that this is probably how many Continental readers first learned about Byron. That was certainly the case with his Polish readers: not only does the first known mention of Byron in Polish appear in the translation of an article from the Geneva-based journal, but we also have evidence that Mickiewicz and his Vilnius friends first learnt about Byron from their readings of the „Bibliothèque Universelle"[35]. While Pictet de Rochemont in his rewritings strengthened the tone of Jeffrey's moral criticism in his review of *Childe Harold*, Canto III, Philarète Chasles dismissed it altogether, rewriting Jeffrey's moral reservations into the highest expression of praise.

The image of Byron as the Romantic icon for most of Continental Europe was probably most widely spread by Amédée Pichot's and Eusèbe de Salle's French translations of Byron's works, which started to appear in 1819. Pichot's introduction to that publication was revised for the subsequent editions, and from the fourth edition of 1823 onwards it was preceded by "Notice préliminaire" by Charles Nodier[36]. In the introductions to the second and third editions, which, as he admitted in a footnote, consisted mainly of adaptations and translations of British reviews, Pichot declared Byron to be the main representative of Romantic literature.

Pichot understands Romantic literature in Staël's terms, conflating her description of literature of the North with her vision of Romantic literature in *De l'Allemagne*. According to Staël, people of the North value freedom, find inspiration in Nature, whose ferocity leads to their melancholy, and their poetic tradition derives from Ossian.

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33 Letter to Moore of 10th March 1817. In: *BLJ*, V, p. 185–186.

34 [C. Pictet de Rochemont], *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto the Third. Le Pélérinage de CHILDE HAROLD. Troisième chant. Par Lord Byron*, "Bibliothèque universelle des sciences, belles lettres et arts"1817, vol. 5: Littérature, pp. 72–100.

35 J. Kleiner, *Mickiewicz*, vol. 1: *Dzieje Gustawa*, 3rd rev. ed. Lublin 1995, p. 221, footnote 47; p. 448–449, footnote 5.

36 For a list of Pichot's editions and their contents, see E. Estève, *Byron et le romantisme français: essai sur la fortune et l'influence de l'oeuvre de Byron en France de 1812 à 1850*, Paris 1907, pp. 527–528. *Gallica. Bibliothèque numerique*.

And indeed Ossian is presented by Pichot as Byron's antecedent in his depiction of Nature:

> Libre, sauvage, impétueuse et imposante dans ses inspirations hardies et même dans ses écarts, la littérature romantique est l'interprète de la nature, des passions, des souvenirs du moyen âge et des superstitions du cœur. Tantôt elle plane avec le génie des temps chevaleresques sur les ruines de la féodalité, assiste aux tournois des preux, erre sous les voûtes des temples gothiques […], ou s'égare dans les regions de la féerie et des enchantemens; tantôt c'est l'esprit de la solitude qu'elle évoque dans le silence des nuits, dans les profondeurs religieuses des forêts et sur la cime altière des monts. Son pinceau créateur nous retrace avec des couleurs nouvelles les magnifiques tableaux de l'univers, et sait donner la vie aux objets inanimés; ses descriptions de la nature nous charment d'autant plus qu'elle la peint moins par sa forme matérielle que par les sensations qu'elle nous fait éprouver[37].
>
> Free, wild, impetuous and imposing in both its audacious inspirations and its excesses, Romantic literature is the interpreter of Nature, of passions, of memories of the Middle Ages and superstitions of the heart. Sometimes it hovers with the spirit of chivalric times over the feudal ruins, takes part in tournaments, wanders under the vaults of Gothic temples […], or loses itself in the regions of magic and enchantment; sometimes it is the spirit of solitude that it evokes in the silence of the night, in the holy depths of forests and on the proud mountain peaks. Its creative brush redraws for us with new colours the splendid pictures of the universe, and knows how to bring to life inanimate objects; its descriptions of nature enchant us all the more as it paints it less through its material form than by sensations which it makes us experience.

The image of Byron that Pichot introduces in his essay uses the same syntactic structure as the passage characterizing Romantic literature, which reveals the analogies between the two: Byron rather than Byron's works appears to embody the main characteristics of this type of poetry:

> Indépendent par son caractère comme par sa fortune, dédaignant avec fierté les règles de l'art pour s'abandonner sans retenue à l'impression du moment et aux inspirations du moment et aux inspirations bizarres du génie le plus capricieux, lord Byron exerce une sorte de magie tyrannique sur ses lecteurs, par son enthousiasme entraînant, la sombre énergie de son âme, le vague mélancolique de ses souvenirs, et la voix solonnelle et terrible de ses douleurs et de ses ressentimens[38].
>
> Independent both in his character and in his fortune, proudly despising the rules of art so as to abandon himself without any restraint to momentary impressions and momentary inspirations and strange inspirations of the most

[37] [A. Pichot], *Notice sur Lord Byron et ses écrits*. In: *Œuvres complètes de Lord Byron*, 2nd ed., Paris 1820, vol. 1, pp. i–xxxvi (P. i–ii). Google book. My own translation follows.

[38] *Ibidem*, p. II.

> capricious genius, Lord Byron exercises some kind of tyrannical magic over his readers with his stirring enthusiasm, dark energy of his soul, melancholy flow of his memories, and the solemn and terrible voice of his pain and resentments.

The defiance of the rules, enthusiasm and melancholy, all key concepts in Staël's thinking on Romantic literature, are apparent in these characteristics, which draw very strongly on the aesthetics of the sublime[39]. Pichot's equation of Byron with the "Romantic" was to reverberate in numerous publications over the Continent. In his article on the reception of Byron in Spain, Derek Flitter quotes a passage from the preface to a historical novel *Los bandos de Castilla* (The factions of Castile 1830) by Ramón López Soler, where Soler tries to "encapsulate the essence of the 'Romantic'"[40]. The very opening sentence of the passage echoes Pichot's definition:

> Wild, impetuous, we might even say savage, as admirable in the audacious flights of its fantasy as it is striking in the sublimity of its extravagance, we may declare Romantic literature to be the interpreter of those elusive and ineffable passions which, lending to man a sombre mien, urge him towards solitude, where he seeks in the ocean's roar and in the whistling wind the images of his own sorrows[41].

Flitter notices that although Byron is not mentioned in Soler's text, the vision of Romantic literature appears to be based on his work, and indeed the verbal echoes confirm that it may have been at least partially inspired by Pichot's account of Byron – unless Pichot and Soler used some common source I have not identified. The Ossianic context within which Byron is presented in Soler's text points to Staël's concept of the literature of the North as the starting point for their idea of Romantic literature.

Pichot's 1820-1 introductions also offer a characteristic instance of rewriting British critics for the needs of the newly emerging French Romantic movement. Central to his introduction is the analogy between Byron and Rousseau, which he presents on the basis of John Wilson's review of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV in "The Edinburgh Review", where Byron and Rousseau are perceived as modern writers who fascinate the reader more by their personalities than their work, as their work is the expression of their character[42]. Byron's toying with the conventions of the romance in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* combined with the topicality of his subject, subjectivity and the melancholy of his poetic tales easily yield to the Romantic classification.

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39 I am grateful to Richard Cardwell for pointing this link to me.

40 D. Flitter, *"The Immortal Byron" in Spain: Radical and Poet of the Sublime*. In: *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, vol. 1, p. 133.

41 "Libre, impetuosa, salvaje, por decirlo así, tan admirable en el osado vuelo de sus inspiraciones como sorprendente en sus sublimes descarríos, puédese afirmar que la literatura romántica es el intérprete de aquellas pasiones vagas e indefinibles que, dando al hombre un sombrío carácter, lo impelen hacia la soledad, donde busca en el bramido del mar y en el silbido de los vientos las imágenes de sus recónditos pesares". Qtd. in Flitter, p. 134.

42 J. Wilson, from his unsigned review, "The Edinburgh Review", Sept. 1818, vol. 30, pp. 87–120. In: *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 147–154.

By 1823 British reviewers had generally turned against Byron, and Byron's classicist sympathies had become widely known, so Pichot's introduction to the 1823 edition, now expanded to *Essai sur le génie et le caractère de Lord Byron* and taking up most of the first volume, reflected these developments. Pichot amply quoted from British periodicals, echoing Jeffrey's accusations of immorality in *Don Juan*, and bitterly stated that "waging this war against enthusiasm is not honourable for the genius"[43]. Moreover, he reported on the *Letter to John Murray* in the Bowles/Pope controversy, pointing out that Byron was now attacking the school of which he had been proclaimed the main representative. On the other hand, he perceived Byron's position in France as that of a widely imitated member of the new Romantic school ("We are Romantics like Lord Byron, sir Walter Scott, Châteaubriand, etc, etc.")[44]. The origins of that school, referred to as the Romantic genre, were explored in Charles Nodier's *Notice préliminaire*.

The publication of Nodier's essay coincided with the growing activity of the supporters of the Romantic movement in France. Nodier himself, known for his 1818 novel *Jean Sbogar*, hosted one of the first Romantic *cénacles* at the Library of the Arsenal in the years 1824–1828, and in 1820 he co-authored a melodrama *Le Vampire*, an adaptation of Polidori's *The Vampyre*. As Joanne Wilkes notes, for Nodier the importance of Byron lay in the fact that he expressed the spirit of the age, capturing the feeling of political and spiritual upheaval, and becoming a kind of prophetic figure. This was to become a recurring motif in the French reception of Byron[45]:

> The appearance of Lord Byron in European literature is one of those events whose influence can be felt by all the people and all generations, not however because Lord Byron is, as some thoughtless critics have claimed, the creator of a new poetic genre [school?][46] […] Witness to the renewal of a civilization, Lord Byron has been the most powerfully inspired interpreter of all the emotions, of all the passions, to speak plainly, of all the frenzies which awake in the stormy interval in which the efforts of a society coming into being are mixed up with the convulsions of a society in decline. He has no more invented this poetry than this state of affairs: he has revealed it[47].

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43 "cette guerre faite à l'enthousiasme n'a rien d'honorable pour le génie". *Œuvres de lord Byron*, 4th ed., Paris: 1823, vol. 1, p. cxv. My own translation.

44 "Nous sommes romantiques comme lord Byron, sir Walter Scott, Châteaubriand, etc, etc." *Ibidem*, p. cxlv.

45 J. Wilkes, *'Infernal Magnetism': Byron and Nineteenth-Century French Readers*. In: *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, vol. 1, p. 17.

46 My own translation.

47 Transl. by J. Wilkes. In: Wilkes, *"Infernal Magnetism"*…., In: *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, vol. 1, p. 17. "L'apparition de lord Byron dans la littérature européenne, est un de ces événemens dont l'influence se fait ressentir à tous les peuples et à toutes les générations; non que lord Byron soit, comme l'ont avancé quelques critiques irréfléchis, le créateur d'un nouveau genre de poésie [...].Témoin du renouvellement d'une civilisation, lord Byron a été l'interprète le plus puissamment inspiré de tous les sentimens, de toutes les passions, tranchons le mot, de toutes les frénésies qui s'éveillent dans l'intervalle orageux d'une societé naissante, et les convulsions d'une societé qui tombe. Je le répète: il n'a pas inventé cette poésie que cet état de choses. Il l'a révélée" C. Nodier, *Notice préliminaire*. In: *Œuvres de lord Byron*, 4th ed., Paris 1823, vol. 1 p. i–ii.

For Nodier, Byron opens a new literary epoch, which is a reaction against the age of reason. Nodier's vision of literature as expressing the spirit of the time ties with other contemporary historicist views, such as Staël's or Hazlitt's; Chasles's essay I referred to earlier uses as its epigraph Hamlet's words: "Poets are [...] the abstract and the brief Chronicle [sic!] of the Time" (II, ii), translated into French as "le mirroir des peuples et la brève chronique des tems"[48].

Pichot was certainly not the first French writer who had perceived Byron as a Romantic. However, owing to the wide circulation of his translations, he was the one who popularized the French image of Byron as the main representative of new Romantic poetry across the Continent[49]. All the paratexts published in Pichot's editions served as a major source of information on Byron for most of his Continental readers, either directly, for those who read in French, or in the form of acknowledged and unacknowledged translations and adaptations. Among the latter it is worth noting the translation of Pichot's introduction to the third edition of Byron's *Oeuvres* in "Pamiętnik Warszawski" (Warsaw Journal) in 1823[50] and the unacknowledged adaptation of Charles Nodier's *Notice* by Karol Wójcicki in *Życiorysy znakomitych ludzi wsławionych w różnych zawodach* (*Lives of great men renowned in various professions*, 1850)[51].

Twenty-first century British scholars sometimes reject 'Romanticism' as too ambiguous a term or try to think of it in terms of idealism and transcendence. According to the latter view, most of Byron's works are hardly Romantic, since, like *Don Juan*, they are firmly rooted in reality. But the Romantic Byron as a subjective poet of passion and melancholy, who expresses all the anxieties of his age, is a lasting presence in the history of European literature. Originally he was constructed on the basis of both his own early poetical works and British reviews, only to become appropriated by the Romantics in Italy, France and Poland in their campaign against the Classicists, even before his death in Greece consolidated his status as a Romantic icon.

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48 Chasles, p. 237.
49 Cardwell, *Introduction*, p. 4, Cochran p. 32.
50 *Wiadomość o Lordzie Byronie i jego pismach*, trans. by J.K. Jaślikowski, *Pamiętnik Warszawski*, 3 (1823), pp. 5–23.
51 K.W. Wójcicki, *Lord Bajron*. In: *Życiorysy znakomitych ludzi wsławionych w różnych zawodach*, Warszawa 1850, nakł. J. Bernsteina, I, pp. 369– 410.

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Streszczenie

Z początkiem XIX wieku dla większości czytelników w krajach Europy kontynentalnej Byron był uosobieniem ducha romantyzmu. Termin „romantyczny" nie był jednak używany w stosunku do poety w Wielkiej Brytanii. Na czołowego przedstawiciela romantyzmu wykreowali Byrona francuscy krytycy, szczególnie Amédée Pichot and Charles Nodier, w swoich wstępach do francuskich przekładów dzieł Byrona, przez które najczęściej europejscy czytelnicy zapoznawali się z twórczością poety. Dyskurs francuskich krytyków oparty był głównie na brytyjskich artykułach, które ukazały się w „The Edinburgh Review". Francuscy ludzie pióra uznali subiektywizm i emocjonalizm poezji Byrona, podkreślany przez Francisa Jeffreya i Johna Wilsona w recenzjach na łamach tego czasopisma, jako wyraz literatury romantycznej i ogłosili go przedstawicielem nowego ruchu literackiego, ukazanego przez Germaine de Staël w jej głośnej książce *O Niemczech*.

Summary

For most Continental readers in the early nineteenth century Byron embodied the spirit of Romanticism. The term 'romanticism', however, in reference to the new literary movement, was not used in British criticism. The role of the Romantic Poet was assigned to Byron by French critics, perhaps most influentially in Amédée Pichot's and Charles Nodier's introductions to the French translations of his works widely read across Europe. Most of the French critical comments were substantially based on British reviews of his poetry. French critics recognized the subjectivity and emotionalism of Byron's poetry underlined by Francis Jeffrey and John Wilson in their reviews as expressive of new Romantic literature, and they linked Byron's name to the literary movement which Germaine de Staël presented in *De L'Allemagne*. The aim of this paper is to examine the ways in which French writers drew on British literary criticism, particularly Francis Jeffrey's articles in "The Edinburgh Review", to establish Byron's reputation as a leading representative of the new Romantic school of poetry on the Continent.

Biography

Monika Coghen is a faculty member in the Institute of English Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. She has published articles on British Romantics and the Gothic, particularly on the dramas by Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Byron, and on the Polish reception of British Romanticism. Her other areas of interest include the British nineteenth-century novel and Polish Romanticism.

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